Our Places Our Names

Waterways Naming Project

Reinstating our Peoples' traditional names for waterways

May 2020

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL
HERITAGE COUNCIL

“Naming unnamed waterways and renaming of named waterways, with Traditional names, is an important step in realising self-determination for Victorian Traditional Owners”

Decolonisation of the Landscape

Freshwater and its sources are fundamental parts of the fabric of Aboriginal Culture. Unfortunately, many of these sacred and vital water sources are now represented by names that in no way reflect their importance to Aboriginal People.

Prior to European settlement, all rivers, creeks and their tributaries would have had a name or be known by other means by the Traditional Owners. Evidence of his can be seen on many of the early surveyor maps where many of the currently unnamed waterways have Traditional names. It is a great loss that many of these names have been omitted from the current VICNAMES dataset.

Today, across Victoria, there are many named waterways that include references to European settlers who undertook activities and enacted atrocities upon Traditional Owners. The names of these people cannot continue to be memorialised or honoured. Additionally, many waterways were given bland, general descriptive names (such as Deep Creek) that only served to educate future settlers of the general nature of these invaluable resources.

The decolonisation of the landscape is vital in re-asserting the Traditional Ownership and rights of Traditional Owners across the State. This process of renaming and naming waterways is one very important step on a long road.

How Naming Happens

Within the existing legislative framework, a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) or other Traditional Owner group can submit a proposal to the relevant naming authority to:

- name currently unnamed waterways, or
- add Traditional names to currently named waterways (although simply just adding Traditional name has no particular consequence under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006).

However, the naming and renaming of waterways can be a complex prospect.

All geographic features, including waterways, can have up to seven different names. These are categorised as:

- Registered
- Dual
- Historic
- Base
- Recorded
- Traditional, and
- Archived.

This may seem confusing, but each category of name serves a different function and a place can have multiple names across the seven categories. The renaming process is explained further in the attached DELWP ‘Quick Reference Guide to Aboriginal Naming’.

Naming Process for Registered Names

For the Aboriginal name to appear on road signs and Google Maps etc, the name needs to be the ‘registered’ name. This in most cases will require the RAP or TO group to undertake the renaming process.

1 Identify the Naming Authority

Victoria is unique in that it has a complex naming process. In many instances, the naming authority is DELWP and Victorian municipal councils, however, other government authorities and private organisations also hold this role (ie. Melbourne Water). If you are unsure, consultation with your local council or DEWLP will be required to determine the naming authority for a particular waterway before a proposal can be undertaken.

2 Present a Proposal

Once a naming or renaming proposal has been approved by the naming authority, the proposal is then passed onto the Office of Geographic Names. Their responsibility it is to ensure the proposal meets all the necessary requirements. If the proposal meets these standards, the name is then gazetted, registered and added to the VICNAMES dataset.

Naming Process for Traditional Names

If a RAP or Traditional Owner group is seeking to name a currently unnamed waterway or rename an existing named waterway, they can find out how by using this link:

https://www.propertyandlandtitles.vic.gov.au/naming-places-features-and-roads/naming-rules-for-places-in-victoria

Further Information

To look up the name of any Victorian waterway, or to find out if a waterway has a name, you can access the VICNAMES dataset using this link:

https://maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/VicnamesUI.jsp

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL
HERITAGE COUNCIL

Office of the
Victorian Aboriginal
Heritage Council

Level 3, 3 Treasury Place
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002

T: 03 7004 7198
E: vahc@dpc.vic.gov.au

Quick reference guide for Aboriginal naming

This guide is an excerpt from Naming rules for places in Victoria - Statutory requirements for naming roads, features and localities 2016 (the naming rules).

The uniqueness of Aboriginal language is based on location

Each language is deeply rooted to the land and offers an opportunity to connect a name to a place. Victoria is unique within Australia in that it has a devolved naming process. The 79 Victorian municipal councils are the state's primary naming authorities; however, a number of government departments, government authorities and in some cases, private organisations also hold this role.

To help ensure the preservation of Aboriginal language across Victoria, Geographic Names Victoria (GNV) encourages naming authorities to consider Aboriginal names when assigning names to roads, features and localities. We also remind naming authorities that as part of the process they must engage with Traditional Owners.

Key principles of the naming rules that apply to the naming of localities

Principle (A) Ensuring public safety

Aboriginal names must not create risk to public safety or operational safety for emergency response, or cause confusion for transport, communication and mail services. Aboriginal names that initially appear complex will, over time, become familiar and easy to use

Principle (B) Recognising the public interest

When determining the assignment of an Aboriginal name, the long-term effect on the wider community needs to be considered.

Principle (C) Linking the name to place

Names should be relevant to the local area. Names that link the name to the place could relate to Aboriginal culture and occupation of the land, local flora and fauna, Australian war contributions, European exploration and settlement, local geography and geology, significant events, the cultural diversity of past and current inhabitants, or patterns of land usage and industrial/ mineral/ agricultural production.

Principle (D) Ensuring names are not duplicated

Proposed names must not duplicate another name within prescribed distances, irrespective of locality and/or council boundaries. Duplicates are considered to be two (or more) names within close proximity, or names that are identical or have similar spelling or pronunciation. VICNAMES – the Register of Geographic Names can be used to check for duplicate names.

Principle (E) Names must not be discriminatory

Names must not discriminate and or cause offence on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality or gender.

Principle (F) Recognition and use of Aboriginal languages in naming

The use of Aboriginal languages in the naming of a road, feature and locality is encouraged, subject to agreement from the relevant Traditional Owner group(s).

Principle (G) Dual names

Australian states and territories use dual names as a way of recognising the names given to places by different enduring cultural and language groups. In Victoria, the approach to giving simultaneous and joint recognition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures through naming is to form a dual name with two distinct name parts, usually one part of non-Aboriginal language origin and the other of Aboriginal language origin.

Principle (H) Using commemorative names

Naming often commemorates a person, event or place. Examples include recognising Aboriginal people or cultural events, or following a theme such as Australian war contributions. When considering a commemorative name, the following points must be considered.

- When deciding on the assignment of a commemorative name, consider the person's achievements, relevant history and association to the area, and the significance of the family/person to the area/land. For example, a family that has been associated with an area for at least 50 years.
- The names of people who are still alive should be avoided because community attitudes and opinions can change over time
- A commemorative name should use only the surname of a person, not first or given names.
- The initials of a given name are not to be used in any instance.

Quick reference guide for Aboriginal naming

Principle (I) Using commercial and business names

Places should not be named after:

- commercial businesses
- trade names
- estate names
- non-profit organisations.

Principle (J) Language

- Geographic names, except when they are proper nouns, must be written in standard Australian English or a recognised format of an Aboriginal language local to the area.
- The name should be easy to pronounce, spell and write, and not exceed three words and/or 25 characters.
  An exception to this is in the use of Aboriginal languages, when it is accepted that Aboriginal names that initially appear complex will, over time, become familiar and easy to use.
- "The" is not a suitable prefix in naming of any place. For example, The Patch, The Basin.
- The apostrophe must be deleted from proposed names written with a final 's and the possessive's should not be included in the first instance.
- Punctuation marks such as commas and full stops are not allowed.
- Diacritical marks (symbols such as ´, ¸ or ¯) will be omitted from names drawn from languages that use such marks. For example, Cape Reamur (not Cape Réamur).
  Abbreviations are not allowed with exception of 'St' (saint).
- For the purposes of consistency, names starting with Mc or Mac must not have a space included between the Mc or Mac and the rest of the name. For example, MacKenzie.
- A name cannot be a numeric value. For example, 1st, or 1918.

Section 4: Features

A feature is considered to be a unique geographical place or attribute that is easily distinguished within the landscape. For example, a feature can be a mountain, watercourse, building, prominent structure or park.

Feature type

The feature type should be included in a feature's name and located after the unique feature name. An exception to this is the use of Aboriginal names or words if the Aboriginal name already includes details of the feature type. For example, Birrarung Marr is a park in Melbourne, with Marr translating from the Woiwurrung language to mean 'park' in English.

Waterways

For the purposes of complying with these naming rules, it is necessary for naming authorities to describe in exact detail the full extent of any waterway it is proposing to name or rename, which will ensure official records are unambiguous. The naming of waterways may have implications under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2007.

Features with Aboriginal names

There are numerous features in Victoria that have Aboriginal names. In many instances, these features are defined differently to western concepts of place (e.g. middens, rocky escarpments, sites on a mountain or beach, rocky outcrops or stone arrangements), but their names are just as important to include in VICNAMES (see maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/VicnamesUI.jsp).

Any person or organisation can develop a proposal to register a feature's Aboriginal name, whether the feature has an existing registered name or not.

If approved the process involves one of the following:

- Recording the Aboriginal name as 'Registered' (see Section 1.7) or 'Dual' results in the Aboriginal name being recognised as the official name in use for the feature. The name will appear on Vicmap standard maps for the area.
- Recording the Aboriginal name as 'Traditional' or 'Historic' results in the Aboriginal name being recognised on Vicmap standard maps; the name can be located by researchers and be used on specialised maps.

All names, regardless of their status, will be held in VICNAMES.

Initiating a proposal

Anyone can develop a proposal to name or change the name of a road, feature or locality, including a locality's boundaries. The proposal needs to be submitted to the naming authority responsible for the area in/across which the road, feature or locality is situated – it is important to note that the council or relevant naming authority should be contacted for advice because some naming authorities may have their own naming policies or guidelines that augment these naming rules and may need to be applied.

Proposals should include:

- the proposed name
- the location of the road or feature, including a map (and, if relevant, its current name)
- background information on why the naming authority should consider naming or changing the name or boundary, e.g. why the proposed name is considered appropriate (include any history or local relevance) – see Principle (C)
- the reason for the proposal (why the current name is not considered appropriate or any other relevant information)
- contact details of the proposer(s) and information on public consultation that has occurred and/or support and non-support that has been gathered from community members or groups
- a statement saying that the proposed name conforms to the relevant principles and requirements in the naming rules.

Quick reference guide for Aboriginal naming

Process for a Traditional Owner group to develop an Aboriginal naming proposal

If a Traditional Owner group wants to name a road, feature or locality but is unsure who the naming authority is and/or if there is an officially registered or locally known name, then follow the steps below or contact GNV for further advice.

Identify the name

The Aboriginal name for a road, feature or locality can be identified by any person, group or organisation using specific cultural knowledge or historical documentation relevant to the area in which the road, feature or locality is situated.

Locate other names

The proposer must check whether other names are officially registered or recorded (this can be checked using VICNAMES at maps.land.vic.gov.au/lassi/VicnamesUI.jsp). This will help identify the exact location of the road, feature or locality to which the proposed name will apply, and whether the wider community uses an unofficial name.

If an unofficial name exists, the proposer may submit the naming proposal as a Dual name with the existing registered or unofficial name. There are exceptions to a Dual name not being considered and, therefore, the assignment of an Aboriginal name may not proceed, e.g. to avoid possible confusion for addressing or providing emergency management (refer to Principle (G) Dual names).

If no other name is in use, the Aboriginal name can be recorded as registered, traditional or historic in VICNAMES. Refer to *Section 1.7 Status of names in VICNAMES* and for features *Section 4.9 Features with Aboriginal names*.

Verify the name

When an Aboriginal name has been identified, it must be verified by the Traditional Owner group(s) in the area in which the road, feature or locality is located. In some instances, this might be more than one group. In all instances, the name must be verified by all groups with recognised heritage in the area (for a list of these groups refer to Section 7.3). Further advice can be obtained from Aboriginal Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet (www.dpc.vic.gov.au).

All relevant Traditional Owner groups must give written consent to the name being registered for the road, feature or locality (either as a Dual name or single name). If written consent has not been provided by all groups, contact GNV for further advice.

Contact the naming authority for the road, feature or locality

The proposer should contact the naming authority for the road, feature or locality and submit directly to it a naming proposal. Refer to Section 6.1.1. The naming proposal must then be processed according to the steps in Section 7.2 or Section 7.3 if proposing to use a name from an Aboriginal language.

Developing an Aboriginal naming proposal

Consultation is a key component in the process of naming and renaming roads, features and localities. The process below must be used when proposing to use a name from an Aboriginal language.

While there is a diverse range of Aboriginal organisations in Victoria – local Aboriginal networks, health organisations, arts organisations and local advisory groups – naming proposals should be directed to the relevant Traditional Owner group(s). In Victoria, Traditional Owner groups may be legally recognised through the Native Title Act 1993 as native title holders, the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 as traditional owner group entities or the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 as Registered Aboriginal Parties.

In areas where a Traditional Owner group has not been legally recognised, please contact Aboriginal Victoria for advice about the relevant groups to consult.

Naming authorities wishing to name a road, feature or locality using an Aboriginal language must follow the steps below.

1. Identify a road, feature or locality to be named or renamed.
2. Determine Aboriginal group/s to participate in consultation process.
3. Request the Traditional Owner group(s) nominate members to participate in a consultative group.
4. Consultative group builds awareness of proposal within the Aboriginal community
5. Feedback to the consultative group from the wider Aboriginal community.
6. Consultative group endorses name(s).

History

Information about why a locality names was chosen will help ensure historical information is available to future generations and provide transparency in the naming process. Historical information will be submitted to VICNAMES, the Register of Geographic Names.

Further information

Contact the Geographic Names Victoria on (03) 9194 0282 or email geo.names@delwp.vic.gov.au.